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Centering Equity in Early  
Care and Education:  
*Potential Implications of Universal  
Transitional Kindergarten  
on Oakland's Mixed-Delivery System*



**Oakland Starting  
Smart & Strong**



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# S U M M A R Y

Over the next four years (2022-2026), Transitional Kindergarten (TK) will expand statewide to include all four-year-olds. This represents a major structural shift in the mixed-delivery system of care for our youngest Californians.

With an additional year of public school, Universal Transitional Kindergarten (UTK) will provide free education to Oakland's children at an earlier age and may offer improved curriculum alignment between early education and existing K-12 systems. Yet without careful and equitable implementation that centers the needs of the children, families, and early educators who will be most directly impacted, UTK may pose challenges for working parents, hinder developmentally-appropriate care for young children, and destabilize the early care and education field by removing 4-year-olds from child care settings.

This brief aims to support equitable implementation of UTK that centers children, families, and early educators in Oakland



## What is Universal Transitional Kindergarten?

Transitional Kindergarten is intended to offer a place in public schools for children who are developmentally in-between preschool and kindergarten. Universal Transitional Kindergarten is part of the state budget package adopted by Governor Newsom and state legislators in June 2021. With UTK implementation, all California 4-year-olds will have an option to attend a two-year Kindergarten program, the first year being TK and the second year being Kindergarten, by the 2025-26 school year.

Until recently, it has generally been understood that TK is not preschool or pre-kindergarten, which are foundational learning experiences with low teacher-student ratios for individualized care and instruction. Under Universal Transitional Kindergarten, school districts – including Oakland’s -- will have an opportunity to align their early education curriculum, professional development, and facilities renovations to accommodate 4-year-olds. The state has announced that it will design a new curriculum and work towards age-appropriate, early childhood-centered teacher credentialing for school districts. Currently, there is no state-mandated TK curriculum, and school districts have the flexibility to determine how to meet curricular needs, such as combining TK, K, and/or preschool classrooms.



## What is the Mixed-Delivery System?

The term “mixed-delivery system” refers to the full spectrum of ways that babies and young children are cared for – in private, public, and non-profit early care and education programs and settings. In Oakland, this system includes family child care homes, friend/family/neighbor caregivers, publicly or privately funded child care centers, public early education through Head Start and California State Preschool, and neighborhood family resource centers (FRCs). The mixed-delivery system braids federal, state, and local funding streams to support families, educators/providers, and young children. There is no central administering agency for the mixed-delivery system and its multiple funding streams. Economic conditions influence the system, often at the expense of children, families, and the early childhood workforce.

The California Department of Education (CDE) has recently shared that its vision for Universal PreKindergarten includes TK, the California State Preschool Program, Head Start, and private providers (i.e. family child care providers and child care centers). In other words, CDE proposes that PreK be implemented through the mixed delivery system, but TK will be the only one of these options that is a free and universally accessible option for all four-year-olds.



# How might UTK impact Oakland?

## **School District**

Oakland currently serves 585 children in TK, with estimates to serve between 740 and 824 children in 2022-23. To implement UTK, Oakland Unified School District will have to make major changes with hiring, infrastructure, and curriculum:

- Coordinate before- and after-school care for 4-year-olds, which is a challenge because of transportation concerns. Also, multiple transitions during the day is not developmentally appropriate for young children, and is a stressor for families.
- Recruit credentialed early educators to staff these additional classrooms, and provide professional development on developmentally-appropriate teaching practices.
- Renovate facilities and infrastructure to meet the needs of TK students.
- Adopt a new curriculum and assessment.
- Take into account ongoing facilities needs for the California State Preschool Program to ensure no loss of funding

OUSD has convened a planning committee, which includes OUSD staff, early childhood systems partners, and community based organizations, to gather community input on these issues. The group has uplifted concerns around providing flexible care options that meet a wide range of family structures. The group has also discussed the need to have a teacher recruitment pipeline to adequately staff classrooms.

## **Family Choice**

The legislation implementing UTK includes language on protecting family choice, which means that eligible families can continue to have their children attend Head Start, child care centers, family child care homes, California State Preschool Program, and other state-funded early care and education options that best suit their needs. Currently, income-eligible families will not lose their child care subsidies, and therefore family choice is protected. However, it is unclear if these protections will remain long term. The most impacted families and educators need to have a seat at the table with local implementation plans to ensure these child care options truly meet early childhood needs in Oakland.

## Head Start

Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) are federally funded early childhood education programs and wraparound services for families living below the federal poverty line. Head Start serves children ages 3 to 5 years, and Early Head Start serves pregnant people, infants, and toddlers. In Oakland, the City of Oakland, Unity Council and the YMCA of the East Bay are Head Start grantees, serving a total of 1,864 children and their families.

- The City of Oakland, and its partners, serve 292 HS, 330 EHS, and 52 City-funded HS/EHS children and families. The City's current partners include Brighter Beginnings, St. Vincent's Day Home, Peralta Colleges, and BANANAS.
- Unity Council serves 590 HS and 416 EHS children and families.
- Across their Oakland sites, YMCA of the East Bay serves 100 HS and 114 EHS children and families.

Because UTK will be serving 4-year-olds, the Head Start model will shift to primarily serving ages birth-3. UTK expansion must take place in alignment with ongoing support for Head Start, to ensure that services are not compromised.



## Licensed Child Care: Family Child Care (FCC) Homes and Child Care Centers

Licensed child care includes Family Child Care (FCC) homes and Child Care Centers. FCC providers own home-based child care businesses that care for fewer numbers of children in small settings. FCC providers are either the sole adult caring for children or employ a small staff. For families with limited resources, especially families where parents work non-traditional hours, Family Child Care providers are a lifeline who provide long-term, flexible, and holistic community-based care. Child Care Centers are larger businesses, some with multiple locations, that employ teachers, aides/assistants, site supervisors, and program directors.

All licensed child care providers that serve 4-year-olds are projected to experience substantial revenue decreases as those 4-year-olds enroll in UTK. If enrollment of 3-year-olds is not sufficient to offset the loss of revenue, many providers may limit their services or be forced to shut their doors. Infants and toddlers require more resources to care for than older children, so licensed child care providers would need to hire more staff dedicated to especially labor-intensive work, and families would have to pay increased fees. Given these interwoven challenges, many licensed child care businesses will choose to close.

Oakland is already a child care desert, without enough child care slots available for the number of children who need care. If more child care businesses close due to UTK expansion, this unmet need will increase.

Currently, **69.1 %** of Oakland children ages birth-5 do not have access to licensed child care slots.

For infants and toddlers, **91%** do not have licensed child care.



## Children

Having a consistent routine with focused attention and care is critical for healthy development in young children. While TK will be a full school day for 4-year-olds, the summer break and transportation to after school care, or a change in caregivers, is at odds with best practices for early childhood development. To maintain a truly full-day option, policymakers must fund before and after school care, as well as fund options for consistent, year-round, quality care.

## ECE Workforce

Child care providers in Oakland were hard hit by the pandemic and have taken on health and financial burdens in support of children and working families. Across early childhood systems, the workforce is predominantly older women of color who are severely underpaid and often eligible for public assistance. Because caring for young children is demanding work, many qualified early educators leave the field for opportunities that better value their labor. Under UTK, child care programs will have to recruit and retain staff to care for infants and toddlers, and school districts will have to recruit qualified UTK teachers. Policymakers must invest in quality pay and benefits for the workforce, in order to better recruit and retain educators.



## What can Oakland do to prioritize equity?

- Increase **developmentally appropriate wrap-around services** for children participating in UTK.
- **Include families with young children in planning** to implement UTK with an equity lens.
- Give families the option to choose the type of care appropriate for them by **increasing access to affordable quality early care and education**.
- Expand the supply of child care spaces for **infants and toddlers**.
- Deepen **supports for the Early Care and Education workforce** including training pipelines, increased wages and compensation, and involvement in planning and decision making.
- Ensure that **new sources of funding, such as Measure AA and Measure C, support the mixed-delivery system** and address the impact areas described above.

*To learn more and to share your perspective as a parent or provider, contact Trisha Barua, OSSS Policy Analyst, at [trisha@oaklandmartandstrong.org](mailto:trisha@oaklandmartandstrong.org).*

# Questions & Information

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